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ABSTRACT

Private and personal literacy practices of reading and writing, which have typically been regarded as less important than the more visible and public literacies used by men, are important in the lives of women because they aid the development and empowerment of the self. Qualitative interviews were conducted with six women of diverse socioeconomic status who were, or had been, married to alcoholics, and who, as participants in Al-Anon, used literacy to practice the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous in order to find spiritual solutions to their problems. Literacy is defined as a social practice that is both a repeated action and an action that is engaged in to improve or reach a higher state. Just as spirituality can be seen as a recognition of human powerlessness in which the attainment of a kind of personal power allows individuals to survive the vicissitudes of this life and attain inner peace, so the women's literacy practices allowed them to empower themselves. Al-Anon's doctrine, particularly its oral instruction, served as an interpretive tool for the women that resulted in a transformation in their lives that led to a more inclusive notion of politics. (Appendices include the Twelve Steps of Al-Anon and an essay on research and telling the truth. Contains 134 references.) (MO)

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